

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND
PRESENTATION, PUBLIC HEARING, INTERVIEWS, SPECIAL SESSION
AND WORKSESSION
OF THE CITY COUNCIL
(Adopted September 12, 2005)

July 5, 2005

OFFICIALS PRESENT

Mayor Porter
Councilmember Austin-Lane
Councilmember Elrich
Councilmember Mizeur
Councilmember Seamens
Councilmember Williams

City Manager Matthews
City Clerk Carpenter
HCD Director Daines
Affordable Housing Manager Walker

OFFICIALS ABSENT:

Councilmember Barry

The City Council convened at 7:40 p.m. in the Municipal Building Council Chambers, 7500 Maple Avenue, Takoma Park, Maryland.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Ms. Porter announced that Mr. Barry was traveling and unable to attend the meeting. She also announced that the Council had met in Executive Function Session earlier in the evening to begin the process of the annual evaluation of the City Manager.

Ms. Austin-Lane noted that she met with Metro officials Tuesday of last week to discuss the Metro green space and the City's involvement in what is planned for there. She said that once the sales agreement is made available, the City needs to hold a public hearing if WMATA does not.

Mr. Williams commented on the 4th of July celebration. Mr. Williams noted he recently attended a meeting of the National Association of Regional Councils.

Ms. Mizeur announced a tour of Park and Planning parks in and around Ward 2 with Chairman Berlage, scheduled for July 11 at 6:00 p.m.

Ms. Porter announced the death of Annie Cotton, a City crossing guard. She noted that she and Councilmembers Elrich and Seamens had attended the MML Convention at the end of June.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Howard Kohn, Chair of the Community Center Committee, reported that the next meeting is scheduled for July 12. The Committee will be talking about the gym and parking. He noted that the Committee would like the Municipal Building complex be renamed “Takoma Center” with the words “Sam Abbot Community Center” over the front door of the Municipal Building.

Mr. Kohn also reported that the Takoma Foundation is on the verge of transferring money to furnish the Community Center. They are saving \$5000 to contribute to the opening ceremony. The Foundation will take on the cost of buying and inscribing the brick pavers, and large plaques to honor large donors, but would like the City to pay for installation.

Rino Aldrighetti, 7213 Central Avenue, said he would be pleased to see Sam Abbot’s name remain on the building. He spoke about Mayor Abbot and about the meaning of the word “citizen.” He would like to see the word “citizen” used with the name of the building.

Lynn Bradley, Maple Avenue, asked that the City lower the speed hump in front of her house. She also stated that she would prefer “citizens center” in the name of the building. Citizens implies that residents can come to speak at Council meetings. She also commented that “Takoma Center” sounds like it is part of Takoma, DC.

1. Community Center Update

Ms. Matthews reported that some of the outstanding proposed change orders have been resolved, but some are still outstanding. Staff has told the representatives of James F. Knott Construction that we are not prepared to accept some items. The resolution of the PCOs will have a material impact on the acceptance of a bid for the Community Plaza Level. Ms. Matthews said she will provide more information to Council next week.

Ms. Porter asked if we can award the bid and delay the start of construction.

Ms. Matthews said we are reviewing the situation to see what flexibility we have. Final information on the change orders should be available on July 18.

Mr. Elrich commented on the slow pace and low number of people working on site.

Ms. Matthews responded that Mr. White (of James F. Knott) has acknowledged that not as many people are on site as he would have hoped. She said she will forward the question on to him.

Ms. Matthews asked for Council’s thoughts on removing the chair rails from the design in the atrium. During the value engineering, baseboards were removed from the plan, but not the chair rails. The contractor has suggested we delete the chair rails and receive a credit for them.

Ms. Williams commented that we need to ensure that if we go without baseboard, any area where there are outlets will not necessitate any additional work to cover holes. We will need baseboard on the drywall area.

Mr. Seamens commented that he continues to be surprised by the value engineering. He asked if there is anything else Council should be aware of.

Ms. Matthews said the difficulty is that the documentation is not very substantial.

Mr. Williams noted that in the plan for the new building, Council would be meeting in the multipurpose room instead of the Council Chambers. He said he would like to have a Council discussion about the Council continuing to meet in the Council Chambers to save money.

Mr. Seamens commented that he was interested in the idea. He suggested that at the same time, Council should talk about the need for the large table in front of the stage, which impedes the use of the Chambers as a theater.

PUBLIC HEARING

2. Public Hearing on Proposed Amendment to the City Charter to Permit Greater Flexibility in Scheduling the Nominating Caucus

The Public Hearing was convened at 8:24 p.m.

Ed Sharp, Glaizewood Court, spoke in opposition to the amendment. He commented that it is costly and unnecessary.

INTERVIEWS

3. Arts and Humanities Commission Interviews

Arts and Humanities Commission - Klara Ernemo and Welmoed Laanstra

Ms. Ernemo was not present.

Council interviewed Ms. Laanstra.

4. Commission on Landlord-Tenant Affairs Interviews

Council interviewed Kelly A. Bosma and Robert Liebreich.

5. Committee on the Environment Interviews

Council interviewed Jon M. Lipshultz, Timothy Male, Catherine Tunis, Kea Woodruff, and Robert Goo.

SPECIAL SESSION

6. First Reading Resolution Amending the City Charter, Section 604, to Permit Greater Flexibility in Scheduling the Nominating Caucus

Ms. Porter commented that she believed cost should not be the main issue in making the decision on amending the Charter. The caucus should be open to everyone. Holding the caucus on Rosh Hashanah would preclude the participation of some people at the first meeting, even if then the caucus votes to meet the following day. The last time this happened, there was some concern as to whether one of the nominees might try to derail the rescheduling of the caucus. I am concerned about how we effectively communicate this to the public.

Mr. Williams said he agrees with Ed Sharp's concerns. We could live with what we have. We don't need to go through a rushed process that costs money which we could have fixed previously when we adopted a new City Charter. Mr. Williams said he thinks we can trust the reliability and fairness of our residents in understanding that we would move it to the following night. If we are trying to avoid one particular conflict, I don't see a need to change it.

[There was no motion made to amend the Charter.]

7. Second Reading Ordinance Adopting the FY06 Police Pay Plan

Motion by Elrich; second by Austin-Lane.

Ordinance 2005-19 was adopted by roll-call vote (VOTING FOR: Porter, Austin-Lane, Elrich, Mizeur, Seamens, Williams; ABSENT: Barry).

Ordinance 2005-19 (Attached)

8. Resolution Authorizing the Issuance of Temporary Parking Permits to City Businesses and Residents Who Will be Blocked From Access to Parking Due to Public Construction Projects

Motion by Elrich; seconded by Mizeur.

Ms. Daines explained that without this authorization, the City Manager has no authority to issue temporary parking permits under these circumstances. The permits would be temporary as

construction along Carroll and Laurel proceeds.

Resolution 2005-53 was adopted (VOTING FOR: Porter, Austin-Lane, Elrich, Mizeur, Seamens, Williams; ABSENT: Barry).

**Resolution 2005-53
(Attached)**

BREAK

Council recessed for a scheduled break at 9:13 p.m. and reconvened in Worksession at 9:28 p.m.

WORKSESSION

9. Discussion of the Affordable Housing Policy and Action Plan

Ms. Walker commented on key factors affecting affordable housing in the city. There has been an increase in the cost of housing as compared to salary increases. There has been a loss of rental units. Many units are being converted to condominiums. Some of these properties have been sold to tenants. There is a concern when tenants cannot purchase. There has been a loss of federal funding. The Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission provides low interest loans to first time homebuyers. Rents have been increasing in Montgomery County. Rent stabilization in Takoma Park does work, however, with the wide disparity in rents, we do not have anything in place to motivate a landlord to re-rent to a low income tenant upon vacancy of the unit.

Ms. Walker described the accomplishments of the City's programs, including the tenant capacity building program, encouraging and assisting tenants who wish to purchase, educational outreach, the Homebuyer's Club.

Goals include continuing the capacity building program, working toward changes to State and County laws, targeting the Homebuyers Club to Spanish speaking tenants, creation of a revolving loan fund, promoting the housing tax credit program, continuation of recodification of the rent stabilization law to address gray areas, and continuation of proactive enforcement of the air conditioning law.

A long term goal is the assessment of abandoned and vacant properties to establish a detailed action plan to deal with the properties.

Ms. Porter asked about partnering with the State and County on local condo conversion laws.

Ms. Walker said the County has two laws and the State has a law. We are seeing that there is a lot of conflict in how they work together. The County law did give some extended rights. We need to review the laws to see if we need to have our own law.

Ms. Porter commented that there does not seem to be much protection for tenants in the event of condo conversion. Maybe we could work it into our tenant opportunity to purchase law.

Ms. Walker said tenants do have an opportunity to purchase.

Mr. Elrich said he suggests we go it alone or talk with Montgomery County. Given the price you can get for condos, there is a real incentive to convert rental properties to condos. Where will people go? We should see if we can step up to the plate, and see if the County will partner with us. It is a crisis. Your data shows that rent control works. I think we're doing the right thing with rent control.

Ms. Seamens commented that affordable housing is the number one issue in the region. It should be ours as well. We should move forward with looking at what we can do to protect residents during condo conversions.

Ms. Porter agreed. We ought to be moving as quickly as we can because of the rate of conversion. The price of real estate is driving condo conversion. It is not possible to do a rent stabilization discussion at this time. I am interested in hearing what we can do in this area in the meantime.

Ms. Austin-Lane commented that abandoned and condemned housing is a big problem in the historic district. The longer it takes, the more likely it is that the houses will be demolished. I would like this to be a priority.

Ms. Walker noted that there was a tenant summit meeting this past year. All tenant associations met. They are interested in meeting with the County and State. They are ready and willing to speak up. We are trying to put together a meeting with County officials.

Mr. Seamens asked can we set a priority to refine some alternatives to address condo conversion and abandoned homes.

There was Council consensus to move forward on these two items.

Mr. Elrich asked if staff can make training for people in small buildings different from people in large buildings.

Ms. Austin-Lane agreed. I've heard of landlords that are not happy. I would like to see the landlord certification better serve the smaller rentals.

Ms. Daines commented that this issue goes to staff capacity.

10. Continued Discussion and Decision on Use of Paper Ballots in the 2005 City Election

There was Council consensus to decline the use of the Diebold touchscreen voting machines and

to use paper ballots instead. They discussed the need to recruit additional election judges, whether to allow DC registered voters to serve as judges. Additional discussion will be needed on criteria for election judges and whether to pursue a change to instant runoff voting for future elections.

Additional Agenda Item - Interview of Candidate for Ward 2 Council Seat - Sat Jiwan Khalsa

The candidate indicated he has lived in Takoma Park for six months. He has taken an active role in the community. Serving on the City Council for three months would be an ideal way to continue to contribute. He said he grew up in Boston. He has an interest in graffiti eradication, the parking permit issue, and working with the City Arborist on tree protection.

ADJOURNMENT

The Council adjourned for the evening at 10:32 p.m.